LESSON 4
COURSE OF ACTION WAR GAME

"To be practical, any plan must take account of the enemy's power to frustrate it; the best chance of overcoming such obstruction is to have a plan that can be easily varied to fit the circumstances met; to keep such adaptability, while still keeping the initiative, the best way is to operate along a line which offers alternative objectives."
—B.H. Liddell Hart

Lesson Introduction

The Course of Action (COA) War Game step of the MCPP represents a significant departure from the old way of doing Marine Corps planning. In the old FMFM 3-1, 15-step planning process, the formal act of war gaming COAs did not exist. Today, however, COA War Game is the third MCPP step, and it continues to build upon the work done in the Mission Analysis and COA Development steps. During the COA War Game step, the plan takes a more substantial and detailed form.

Student Requirements by Educational Objective

Requirement 1

Objective 1. Recognize the inputs, tasks, and outputs associated with the COA War Game step.

Objective 2. Use the COA War Game step to create the appropriate outputs of this step in the context of an operational or tactical situation. [JPME 2(c),3(a)(c)]

Objective 3. Understand and apply the red cell concept.

Read:

- MCWP 5-1, pp. 4-1 to 4-4 and Appendix E pp. E-1 to E-10 (14 pages) and review Appendix D pp. D-7 to D-14 (see Lesson 2, Requirement 2 for reading) (8 pages)

The COA War Game tests the courses of action developed by the operational planning team (OPT) against the threat courses of action. This test is conducted through the adversarial war gaming of one or more of the friendly courses of action (war gamed by the planners) against one or more of the threat courses of action (war gamed by the staff intelligence section or designated red cell). Friendly COAs are evaluated either in part or in total against the threat COAs (i.e., the most likely and/or most dangerous) and the environment created by a visualization of the flow of operations through an "action-reaction-counteraction" methodology. It is important to note that the friendly COAs are not compared to each other in this step but in step four, COA Comparison and Decision. There is one similarity between steps three and four, the use of the commander's evaluation criteria. In the COA War Game planning step, the OPT measures each COA against the commander's evaluation criteria with respect to how well a COA performs

against enemy actions (COAs). In the COA Comparison and Decision planning step, the COAs are measured against the commander's evaluation criteria with respect to each other. The OPT, commander, and staff must understand this important distinction.

Even though we test friendly COAs to see how they measure up against a thinking, reactive, enemy, the COA War Game also provides a mechanism to further refine the COAs or portions of the COAs that the commander deems important. As the war game develops, so does the myriad of details derived from the action-reaction-counteraction events of the war game. These details flesh out the synchronization matrix, the decision support matrix and template, and the event matrix. These tools were created in earlier steps but lacked the necessary details required to complete any particular COA. The importance of having the decision support matrix and the event matrix closely tied together will become even more evident during the last two steps of the MCPP, Orders Development and Transition. The details developed during the COA War Game will ultimately be reflected in orders and carried out by the MEF's current operations section. Listed below are examples of a decision support matrix and an event matrix. Notice the links between the named areas of interest (NAIs), decision points (DPs), and target areas of interest (TAIs). Note how each matrix supports or is supported by the other matrix. Also note how the event matrix tracks available collection assets.

Decision Support Matrix

DP	Event	Friendly Action/Decision	NAIs Feeding DP
1	**I Corps moving N/NE** **II Corps artillery with significant combat power**	**Activate NAI 3 & 4 and TAI 3 & 4** **Decide Main Effort (Shift?)** **If II Corps, 1AD BPT ctratk, dir TBD. Focus of air to TAI 1**	**NAI 1**
2	**I Corps moving N/NW** **II Corps artillery with significant combat power**	**Activate TAI 2 & 2A and NAI 5** **Decide Main Effort (Shift?)** **If II Corps, 1AD BPT ctratk, dir TBD. Focus of air to TAI 1**	**NAI 1**
4	**Algerian or other enemy forces arrive**	**1 AD guard flank** **Activate TAI 2A**	**NAI 2**
6	**Algerian or other enemy forces arrive**	**1 AD guard flank** **Activate TAI 5A**	**NAI 6**
3	**I &/or II Corps elements moving N/NE**	**Activate TAI 6** **If II Corps, 1AD ctratk**	**NAI 3**

DP	Event	Friendly Action/Decision	NAIs Feeding DP
3	I &/or II Corps elements moving west	Activate TAI 5 If II Corps, 1AD ctratk	NAI 3
5	I &/or II Corps arrives vicinity either NAI 4/5	Activate TAI 5 & TAI 5A If II Corps, 1 AD ctratk	NAI 4 & 5

Event Matrix

NAIs/TAIs Assigned Assets	NET/NLT	Event/Indicator	Remarks
NAI 1: Tencap/Tac Recee TAI 1: NSFS/MAW	D-30 to Deactivation	Direction of movement of I &/or II Corps units: size and type	DP 1 & DP 2
NAI 2 & 6: 1 AD recon	D-Day to D+20	Movement of enemy forces from west into II MEF sector	DP 4 & DP 6
NAI 5: 1 AD recon TAI 2: 1 AD aviation	Activation/ Deactivation	Movement of significant numbers of I &/or II Corps units and equipment	DP 5
NAI 3: LAR TAI 3: NSFS/MAW	Activation/ Deactivation	Movement of I &/or II Corps units N/NE or West	DP 3
NAI 4: 1 AD recon TAI 4: 1 AD/MLRS/Aviat	Activation/ Deactivation	Continued movement of I Corps units W/NW. Movement of II Corps units W/NW.	DP 5
TAI 6: 2dMARDIV/ MAW	Activation/ Deactivation		
TAI 5: 1 AD	Activation/ Deactivation		
TAI 2A: 1 AD Aviat/MAW	Activation/ Deactivation		
TAI 5A: 1 AD/MAW	Activation/ Deactivation		

The secret to the success of the COA War Game is the red cell's ability to act independently and replicate (as closely and realistically as possible) the adversary about to be confronted. Although the red cell should be created during Mission Analysis, it should be composed of warfighting function representatives who know and understand

enemy capabilities and doctrine, if such doctrine exists. The red cell assesses threat COAs to discern critical threat functions and potential high-value targets. The red cell may also determine potential branches within threat COAs.

The interactive multimedia instruction (IMI) (Web/CD-based) product allows each student to use COA War Gaming in a practical application setting. You can accomplish objective 2 and the application portion of objective 3 only by using the practical application portion of the IMI product.

**** <u>View the interactive multimedia instruction for lesson #4 immediately following this lesson's summary.</u>**

Lesson Summary

The COA War Game step provides realistic and detailed insights into the sequence of possible battlespace events and activities by the evaluation of each COA against a thinking enemy. War gaming highlights critical tasks and identifies possible branches and potential sequels. War gaming helps the commander to identify additional essential tasks, certain advantages, and specific vulnerabilities not previously apparent. The commander may also make modifications that significantly improve a COA. The information the staff and major subordinate commands (MSCs) gain greatly enhances the inputs to the staff estimates and estimates of supportability. The COA War Game step is the last MCPP step completed prior to the commander's decision, made during the COA Comparison Decision step. The next three steps of the process involve the commander, the MSCs, and the rest of the staff much more extensively. Although the OPT still has plenty of work to do, depending on the decision of the commander, the entire staff begins to play a more critical and direct role in the planning process.

JPME Summary

AREA 1					AREA 2				AREA 3					AREA 4					AREA 5				
A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	
							X		X		X												